



RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

[New Search](#) | [About RIRs](#) | [Help](#)

4 April 2005

SCG43443.E

Serbia and Montenegro: Update to YUG34406.E of 19 May 2000 on the treatment of Bosniaks (Muslims) living in Serbia by the state and society in general (May 2000-March 2005)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

General Situation of Bosniaks

Of the roughly 136,000 Bosniaks who lived in Serbia according to the March 2002 census, the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia (HCHRS) reported that approximately 134,000 lived in Serbia's Sandzak region (HCHRS Oct. 2004, 67-68). Bosniak is the official language in three out of six municipalities in Sandzak: in Novi Pazar, Sjenica, and Tutin (ibid.).

In September 2003, the Centre for Peace in the Balkans quoted the leader of Serbia's Muslims, Hamdija Effendi Jusufspahic, as indicating that the situation of Muslims in Serbia had improved since the end of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, although the situation of Muslims in Kosovo was "still poor" (7 Sept. 2003).

While many Sandzak Bosniaks are reportedly apprehensive about the possibility of Montenegro becoming an independent state in 2006, thereby dividing Sandzak in two and increasing the economic hardship of Bosniak traders and entrepreneurs, most Bosniaks in Montenegro apparently favour a separation, partly because Montenegro is viewed as a more tolerant entity toward minorities than Serbia (UNPO 2 Feb. 2005).

Education

The HCHRS reported that the quality of education available to the Sandzak Bosniak community has been in decline since 2000; students complain that they cannot get education in their mother tongue, while other minorities, such as the Croatian community of Vojvodina, have access to instruction in their own language (Oct. 2004, 71). However, it should be noted that the Bosniak and Serbian languages are very similar (HCHRS Oct. 2004, 71) and, together with Croatian, were considered one language before they were separated for political motives (ibid., 69). The Mufti of Sandzak, Muamer Zukorlic, claimed that Muslim students in Serbia were being encouraged to assimilate, with Muslim children being asked, for example, to participate in Christian Orthodox ceremonies, make presentations on "Serbian Churches and Schools" or enter into literary contests with the theme of the "unification of Serbs" (*Politika* 1 Feb. 2004).

In October 2000, a scholar from the Center for the Study of Democracy at Queen's University at Kingston cited a Serbian historian as stating that recent history textbooks for elementary and secondary schools taught children to distrust Croats, Albanians, and Bosniaks, groups they considered "treacherous and sinister in regard to the interests of the Serbian nation" (*Southeast European Politics* Oct. 2000, 30).

Incidents Involving Bosniaks

Many tense interethnic incidents have occurred during sports events; for instance, during a football game between the Rad and Novi Pazar teams in September 2002, crowds shouted anti-Serb epithets (HCHRS Oct. 2004, 66). In September 2002, Agence France-Presse (AFP) reported that violent clashes erupted between Serb and "Muslim" sports fans in Novi Pazar (10 Sept. 2002). During these incidents in Novi Pazar, approximately 800 Bosniaks and 200 Serbs (who had been celebrating a basketball victory by Yugoslavia) clashed, blocked roads and threw stones (AFP 10 Sept. 2002). Police tried to reduce tensions, but several officers were injured (*ibid.*). Some protesters claim to have been provoked by "nationalist symbols" on Serb cars (*ibid.*; see also RFE/RL 28 Nov. 2002), but Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) added that the district council blamed the unrest on "extremists from the local police" who worked with outsiders to raise tensions (*ibid.*).

In January 2004, the Associated Press (AP) reported on the rise of ultranationalism and on the distribution of leaflets in two Serbian towns with large Muslim populations that read "[y]ou will be another Srebrenica," in reference to the 1995 massacre of 8,000 Muslims by Bosnian Serbs (17 Jan. 2004).

Sources mentioned that during the night of 17-18 March 2004, Bosniak Islamic religious sites were targeted in retribution for anti-Serb violence in Kosovo: a Belgrade mosque was allegedly looted and burned by a crowd of thousands and a mosque in Nis was also set on fire (*International Religious Freedom Report 2004* 15 Sept. 2004, Sec. III; AP 23 July 2004; HRW Jan. 2005). In all, the HCHRS reported 40 attacks against property owned by Albanians and Bosniaks in Vojvodina between 17 and 21 March 2004 (*International Religious Freedom Report 2004* 15 Sept. 2004, Sec. III).

On 2 April 2004, a Belgrade mosque that had previously been burned was robbed by unidentified individuals (SRNA 3 Apr. 2004). Although it was reported that police started an investigation (*ibid.*), no information could be found on the results of this investigation among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

Treatment by the State

Serbia and Montenegro guarantees religious freedom, a right that was generally respected by the government (*International Religious Freedom Report 2004* 15 Sept. 2004, Sec. II). However, the *International Religious Freedom Report 2004* also indicated that there were some lapses: for instance, the army could not meet the dietary requirements of all Muslim soldiers, and the Belgrade Islamic community complained of difficulty in obtaining land for an Islamic cemetery in the city (15 Sept. 2004, Sec. II).

While not mentioning Serbian Bosniaks in particular, an article from the BETA news agency indicated that most of those subjected to violence because of their race, religion, or ethnicity do not file charges for fear of revenge; many NGOs further state that prosecutors are not effective in addressing hate crimes (7 Mar. 2003).

Police Treatment

RFE/RL reported that Sandzak Bosniaks are occasionally beaten by plainclothes Serbian police officers in Kosovo when trying to cross the bridge from North Mitrovica to conduct business with ethnic Albanians on the south side of the Ibar River (28 Nov. 2002).

According to a 2003 report by Amnesty International (AI), there have been "allegations of widespread torture and ill-treatment of large numbers of Sandzak Muslims by police during the last ten years" (1 May 2003). AI went on to state that

... there has, to date, been no thorough and impartial investigation into these serious allegations, and that those police officers allegedly responsible have been, and continue to operate in a climate of impunity and are still serving in the police force in the Sandzak (1 May 2003).

The Research Directorate could not corroborate allegations of torture affecting Sandzak Bosniaks within time constraints.

The *International Religious Freedom Report 2004* indicated that police arrested 110 people in connection with the attack against a Belgrade mosque on 17-18 March 2004, as mentioned above (15 Sept. 2004, Sec. III). However, Human Rights Watch (HRW) reported that the number of police officers sent to protect the Belgrade and Nis mosques during the March 2004 incidents was insufficient to control rioters (Jan. 2005). In addition, HRW noted that on 17 March 2004, Serbian Interior Minister Vladan Jovic apparently assured an audience that "police would not use force against 'its own people'" (HRW Jan. 2005). HRW further reported that the three dozen rioters arrested for their participation in the attacks in Nis and Belgrade were charged with belonging to a violent group rather than with ethnically motivated violence (ibid.). On the evening of 17 March 2004, police were allegedly idle when demonstrators attacked an Islamic community centre, and Muslim pastry shops and bakeries in Novi Sad (ibid.).

Police could not find the persons responsible for the stoning of a Montenegro Islamic bookstore in March 2004, but they did detain 10 men in Podgorica after they allegedly threatened to burn Podgorica's central mosque (*International Religious Freedom Report 2004* 15 Sept. 2004, Sec. III).

The coordinator of the Novi Pazar NGO called the Club for Civic Society, Aida Corovic, expressed disappointment that police and soldiers were among the nationalists who provoked the conflict between Serb and Bosniak sports fans in Novi Pazar in September 2002 (RFE/RL 28 Nov. 2002). She added that some Sandzak politicians continue to encourage the ethnic conflict (ibid.). The Yugoslav National and Ethnic Communities Minister indicated that while Sandzak's justice system was in the process of becoming fairer, the region's police force was comprised almost exclusively of ethnic Serbs (ibid.).

For further details on the treatment of Bosniaks in Serbia and Montenegro, please consult pages 63 to 74 of *In Conflict With a State Ethnic Identity: National Minorities in Serbia*, published by the HCHRS in October 2004, at: <<http://www.helsinki.org.yu/doc/reports/eng/Minorities-Study.pdf>>.

Treatment of Bosniaks in Kosovo

The leader of Serbia's Muslims indicating that, in contrast to their situation in Serbia, non-Albanians, including Muslims, were in a more difficult position in Kosovo due to the nationalist Albanian movement there (Centre for Peace in the Balkans 7 Sept. 2003).

A report on the human rights situation in Kosovo prepared by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (COE) expressed concern over the treatment of Bosniaks in Kosovo, among other non-Albanian ethnic groups, who were subject to daily violence at the hands of some ethnic Albanian groups such as the Albanian National Army (ANA); non-Albanians including Bosniaks also allegedly suffered discrimination, especially in judicial system, and the COE claimed that the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) was unsuccessful in guaranteeing sufficient protection to non-Albanian minorities in Kosovo (COE 9 Sept. 2003).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

References

Agence France-Presse (AFP). 10 September 2002. "Basketball Victory Prompts Ethnic Violence in Serbian Town." (Dialog)

Amnesty International (AI). 1 May 2003. "Serbia and Montenegro (1): Legal Loopholes Allow Impunity for Torturers in the Sandzak." <<http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engneur700022003>> [Accessed 22 Mar. 2005]

Associated Press (AP). 23 July 2004. "Work Begins to Rebuild Mosque Torched by Serb Mobs Over Kosovo Ethnic Violence." (Dialog)

_____. 17 January 2004. William J. Kole. "Serbia, Swinging to Right, Still Plagued by Milosevic-Style Vendetta Violence." (Dialog)

BETA. 7 March 2003. Marija Prijic Sladic. "Racial Violence in Serbia: The Fear is There." (Media Diversity Institute) <<http://www.media-diversity.org/beta%20articles/Racial%20violence%20in%20Serbia.htm>> [Accessed 29 Mar. 2005]

Center for Peace in the Balkans. 7 September 2003. "Muslims in Serbia 'In Better Position'." <<http://www.balkanpeace.org/hed/archive/sep03/hed5988.shtml>> [Accessed 29 Mar. 2005]

Council of Europe (COE). 9 September 2003. Parliamentary Assembly. "The

Human Rights Situation in Kosovo."

<<http://assembly.coe.int/Documents/WorkingDocs/Doc03/EDOC9896.htm>>

[Accessed 22 Mar. 2005]

Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia (HCHRS). October 2004. *In*

Conflict With a State Ethnic Identity: National Minorities in Serbia. "Bosniaks."

<<http://www.helsinki.org.yu/doc/reports/eng/Minorities-Study.pdf>> [Accessed

22 Mar. 2005]

Human Rights Watch (HRW). January 2005. "Serbia and Montenegro." *Human Rights Watch World Report 2005*.

<<http://hrw.org/english/docs/2005/01/13/serbia9859.htm>> [Accessed 15 Mar. 2005]

International Religious Freedom Report 2004. 15 September 2004. "Serbia and Montenegro." United States Department of State. Washington, DC.

<<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2004/35482.htm>> [Accessed 8 Mar. 2005]

Politika [Belgrade, in Serbian]. 1 February 2004. "Sandzak Muslim Community Protests at Serbian Orthodox Celebrations in Schools." (BBC International Reports 4 Feb. 2004/Dialog)

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL). 28 November 2002. Jolyon

Naegele. "Yugoslavia: Bosniaks in Sandzak Region Seek Recognition (Part 1)."

<<http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/0/322bcd0da3862fb3c1256c8000596c2a?OpenDocument>> [Accessed 4 Apr. 2005]

Southeast European Politics [Budapest]. October 2000. Vol. 1, No. 1. Dejan

Guzina. "Nation-Building Vs. Minority-Destroying: Majority-Minority Relations in the Post-Socialist Serbia." <<http://www.seep.ceu.hu/volume11/guzina.pdf>>

[Accessed 22 Mar. 2005]

SRNA News Agency [Bijeljina, in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian]. 3 April

2004. "Serbia: Belgrade Mosque, Set Ablaze at Height of Kosovo Unrest, Robbed." (BBC International Reports/Dialog)

Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO). 2 February 2005.

Amela Bajrovic. "Sanjak: Border Threatens Bosniak Community."

<http://www.unpo.org/news_detail.php?arg=45&par=1981> [Accessed 15 Mar. 2005]

Additional Sources Consulted

Oral source: Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia (HCHRS), Belgrade.

Internet sites, including: *Blic*, *Le Courier des Balkans*, European Country of Origin Information Network (ECOI), Freedom House, International Crisis Group (ICG), International Helsinki Federation (IHF), Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE), United Kingdom Home Office - Country Information, World News Connection (WNC).

The attached reproduction is a copy of an official work that is published by the Government of Canada. The reproduction has not been produced in

affiliation with, or with the endorsement of the Government of Canada.